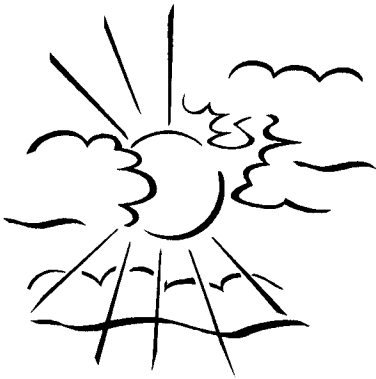


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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, January 30, 2006

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TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Abuse/ Neglect/Protection	2-25
*Child Support	26-28
Health Care	29-44
Juvenile Justice	45-46
Welfare Reform	47-48
Heating Assistance	49-54
Domestic Violence	55
Foster Care	56-57
Homelessness	58-59
Ombudsman	60
Charities	61-64
Early Childhood Development	65-66

Published January 30, 2006

Williamston vigil mourns a lost son More than 300 light candles for Ricky

By Hannah Northey
Lansing State Journal

WILLIAMSTON - Ricky Holland was more than a missing child to this tight-knit community; he was like a son.

More than 300 people gathered Sunday night to say goodbye to the boy who always will be 7 years old.

Many of them had searched on hot, dry summer days for Ricky after his parents reported him missing July 2.

Advertisement

On Sunday, they huddled outside City Hall, struggling against rain and wind to keep their candles lit.

"We know that today he suffers not, that he plays on streets of gold," Karla Mangan, pastor of Mount Hope Church in Williamston, told the crowd. "Yet tonight we want to honor him."

It's not known yet how Ricky died; autopsy results on his remains, found Friday in a wooded area south of Dansville, will take at least a week.

It's not known yet who killed him; his parents sit in jail, each accusing the other.

But those facts didn't matter Sunday.

What mattered was Ricky, a child most people knew only from the "MISSING" flier: Male. White. Blond. Blue eyes. Height: 3 feet, 5 inches. Weight: 55 pounds.

"It's important that he knows somebody somewhere cared about him," said Dawn Cole, who lives on the same street as the Holland family.

Their voices wavering at times, the group chanted along to a reading of Psalm 23 - "The Lord is my shepherd" - and sang along to "Amazing Grace."

"There is good news," Pastor Matthew Mangan said. "Little Ricky is in heaven."

The vigil honored Ricky while allowing the community to grieve.

"When they called off the search, there was no closure. We were left with nothing," said Mary Brown of Lansing. "It's going to give all of us out on the search some closure."

Ricky was a normal 7-year-old boy, said State Journal editorial assistant and writer Rodney Weston, who is Tim Holland's nephew and spoke on behalf of his family.

Weston, who lives in Lansing, saw Ricky twice a year at holiday functions. "He was happy sometimes, quiet at others," he said. "Everyone knows a kid like that."

When they were publicly pleading for Ricky's safe return, the Hollands described him as active and intelligent, though they said he suffered from bipolar disorder and attention-deficit (hyperactivity) disorder.

The Hollands, who moved from Jackson to Williamston just two months before Ricky disappeared, adopted Ricky. They later adopted his three biological siblings, all younger than him, and Lisa also gave birth to a daughter.

Ricky's biological mother, Casey Caswell, hugged her husband and mother as all three sobbed at the vigil Sunday.

"It gave me a little bit of closure," she said of the vigil, "but I'll never have complete closure."

She described Ricky as a "little jokester" who loved the camera.

The Hollands' neighbors have sadder memories - of a boy looking for food and a new home.

JoAnne Perkins said she once found Ricky in her kitchen, pulling sausage out of the freezer.

"I'm hungry," she said he told her. "I want something to eat."

She said she gave him a peanut butter sandwich, orange juice and ice cream. He was carrying a plastic bag with a change of clothes.

"He asked if he could stay," she said.

Perkins and her neighbors continued to worry about Ricky, even after calling police.

Weston said Williamston residents have been wonderful since the start.

"It's the kind of community that reinforces your faith in our species," Weston said. "They were nothing but positive during the search."

DeAnn Dobbs, pastor of Crossroads United Methodist Church in Williamston, closed the ceremony by emphasizing how the town had come together. "That's what part of being Williamston is all about," she said at the end. "This is family."

"Amen."

Contact Hannah Northey at 377-1052 or hnorthey@lsj.com.

Monday, January 30, 2006

Before slaying, boy asked for help Michigan child visited several neighbors before disappearance in July; parents are being held.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

WILLIAMSTON, Mich. -- One night last June, Jo Anne Perkins was startled to find an intruder in her kitchen: a tiny boy, dressed in a khaki jacket, shirt and jeans.

Ricky Holland, appearing much younger than his 7 years, clutched a plastic grocery bag stuffed with his clothes, and was nose-deep in her refrigerator searching for food.

"He said he was hungry, and he wanted something to eat," said Perkins, who fed Ricky two peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches and a glass of juice before sending him home.

"He said, 'Can I stay here with you?' and I said, 'Your mom is going to worry.' ... When he asked if he could stay here, I felt so bad saying no."

Ricky's visit was among several he paid to neighbors in the weeks leading up to his disappearance over the Fourth of July weekend. And neighbors now say they are not surprised that his parents have been named suspects in Ricky's death.

The Ingham County Sheriff's Office said Saturday that human remains found Friday in rural Ingham County were identified as Ricky's by forensic anthropologists using dental records.

His adoptive parents, Tim Holland, 36, and Lisa Holland, 33, were being held as material witnesses.

The Hollands were arrested separately Friday, and each was jailed on \$5,000 bond on an obstruction charge and on \$1 million bond as witnesses in the boy's death, the sheriff's office said. A day earlier, Lisa Holland pleaded not guilty to a felony charge of assault with a dangerous weapon and a misdemeanor charge of domestic violence. She is accused of trying to throw a hair dryer at her husband while he was in the shower in an incident between November and January, and of another incident last week.

Andrew Abood, Lisa Holland's attorney, said his client maintains her innocence on all charges. "Obviously, she's devastated by the whole thing," he said.

Additional charges could be filed. According to Michigan State Police and the prosecutor's office, the Hollands offered differing accounts of what happened to Ricky that implicated each other.

"Lisa Holland provided testimony to officers that she had direct knowledge that Ricky Holland was in fact killed and taken out of the home," Ingham County Sheriff's Detective Sgt. Roy Holliday said in court.

Tim Holland's attorney, Dennis Hurst, could not be reached for comment.

Ricky Holland disappeared from his house about 15 miles east of Lansing over the Fourth of July weekend. Police and volunteers searched up to five miles from the boy's home and lakes, ponds and rivers. The case was featured on the TV program "America's Most Wanted."

During the early days of the search, authorities said they suspected the boy ran away from home. He had run away before, but never for that long.

Still, many neighbors say they suspected that Ricky was abused or neglected, and several had called the police or child protection workers to report their suspicions. The Hollands moved into their home last April.

Neighbors say they never saw any of the Holland children playing outside, although the small street teemed with children. The couple have four other children.

When Ricky showed up at the house of Dawn and Rick Cole, they'd never seen him before.

When it was time to go home, Ricky didn't want to leave. "(Ricky) said 'I ran away because the people don't want me. They want a baby,' " Dawn Cole said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Published January 29, 2006

News of death shocks Williamston

By Hugh Leach
Lansing State Journal

WILLIAMSTON - Sadness. Shock. Anger. Frustration. Relief.

They were among the emotions that ran through the Williamston community Saturday after the news that 7-year-old Ricky Holland is dead.

"It's tragic," said Tom Mitchell, owner of Barrett's Men's Wear. "I feel sorry for the little boy who hardly had a start in life. And I don't understand why the parents deceived all of the people who turned out to hunt for him."

Ricky's parents, Tim and Lisa Holland of Williamston, were charged with obstruction of justice Saturday in connection with his disappearance and death. The cause of death is not yet known.

Before noon, posters began appearing in downtown windows announcing a vigil for Ricky to be held tonight.

Barb Burke, executive director of the Williamston Chamber of Commerce, said word of the vigil was getting out by e-mail and phone calls Saturday.

"Our community came together so wonderfully to try to find Ricky that we felt it would be good for everyone to do something that will help them deal with their feelings," Burke said. "There are so many emotions running through the community right now."

Calise Pratt who lives on a farm near Williamston, was among those who spent hours tramping through fields and along roads on hot days.

"We searched day and night with no sleep," Pratt said. "We sang lullabies as we walked, hoping they would encourage the boy to come to us."

"This little boy was so loved by the whole community who didn't even know him. And this special gift to the community has been taken away."

Liz Toms at Happicat Antiques said the boy's death and the apparent involvement of the parents in it were unexpected. "It's horrible," she said. "And it was so diabolical that they kept everyone hunting so hard for him."

Brian Warren, manager of Carquest in Williamston, said many area farmers set out packaged food and soft drinks randomly on their land in the hope that Ricky, in need of nourishment, would find them.

"A lot of people in this community took the search very seriously," he said. "It pulled this community together, but we certainly didn't want to see the outcome be a dead child."

Bonnie Tyler, who lives next door to the Hollands, said she did not know the family well.

"When we heard what happened on Friday night, it was kind of a shock," she said.

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or hleach@lsj.com.

Vigil tonight

- A candlelight vigil in memory of Ricky Holland is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. today in front of the Williamston City Hall, 161 E. Grand River Ave.

Published January 29, 2006

Body also found at game area in 1970

By Hugh Leach
Lansing State Journal

DANSVILLE - Friday was not the first time hopes were tragically dashed in the 5,000-acre Dansville State Game Area.

In July 1970, the body of 16-year-old Laurie Murningham was found on the edge of the game area at Barnes and Meridian roads.

She had been kidnapped during a robbery at the Lansing gift and antique shop where she worked.

The spot where she was found is just over two miles from where Ricky Holland, the 7-year-old Williamston boy missing since July, was found Friday.

Laurie, daughter of former Lansing Mayor Max Murningham, had been missing for 11 days and was the object of one of the most extensive police manhunts ever held in mid-Michigan.

Three boys searching for returnable pop bottles along the road found her body in a swampy pond in a heavily wooded section of the game area. She had been strangled.

Her killer was never found.

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or hleach

Published January 29, 2006

Ricky's parents accuse each other

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

On the morning of July 2, Tim Holland called 911 from his Williamston home to report that his adopted 7-year-old son had run away.

Tim and his wife, Lisa, knew all along that Ricky was dead, a sheriff's detective testified Saturday.

Now the Hollands are charged with obstructing justice and each jailed on \$1 million bond - and both are accusing each other of killing Ricky.

Decomposed remains found in the open in a wooded area near Dansville were confirmed Saturday to be Ricky's. Forensic anthropologists identified the remains using dental records, sheriff's officials said.

Further charges are pending results of an autopsy, expected later this week.

"The Hollands' stories are different enough that the forensic evidence - once it's been completely evaluated - should lend credibility to one story over the other," Ingham County sheriff's Detective Sgt. Roy Holliday said Saturday after testifying in court.

Arraignments

The Hollands arrived at the downtown Lansing court building just after 10 a.m. Saturday to each be arraigned on charges of obstructing justice in connection with the boy's disappearance and death.

The couple arrived separately: Lisa, in the back seat of an Ingham County sheriff's SUV, and Tim in the passenger seat of an unmarked police car.

In District Judge Patrick Cherry's courtroom, Lisa, then Tim, appeared on a video monitor.

Lisa, 33, stood next to her attorney, Andrew Abood, and answered questions in a soft voice.

Tim, 36, who appeared without his attorney, sobbed when Assistant Prosecutor Michael Ferency described how his statements had led to the discovery of Ricky's remains.

When asked by Judge Cherry if he had anything to say, Tim Holland, trying to compose himself, answered, "No, your honor."

The couple's next court appearance is scheduled for Feb. 9, when they will each have a preliminary hearing to determine whether there's enough evidence for trial.

The couple's home on Douglas Street again was being treated as a crime scene Saturday, with yellow police tape surrounding it and investigators searching inside.

Ingham County sheriff's Lt. Jeff Joy would not say what investigators from his office, as well as Michigan State Police, were seeking.

Late Saturday afternoon, Lisa's attorney continued to assert his client's innocence.

"We know one thing - that Tim Holland led police to the body," Abood said. "I think a lot of information can be drawn from that fact."

Dennis Hurst, Tim's Jackson-based attorney, could not be reached for comment.

'See justice done'

Relatives are caring for the couple's four children, ranging in age from 1 to 4, police said.

Speaking on behalf of Tim's family, State Journal editorial assistant and writer Rodney Weston, who is Tim's nephew, said the family continues to offer support.

"Tim is our relative, and we do love him," he said. "It's the situation we are disappointed in.

"We want to see justice done for Ricky, however that turns out."

Weston added that Tim's family has a great deal of anger toward Lisa Holland.

The couple had presented a united front until last week, when Tim accused Lisa of throwing an electric hair dryer at him while he was in the shower.

Lisa was arrested Wednesday on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon.

The next day, police say, Lisa told them that her husband killed Ricky and took him out of the home.

On Friday, Tim and his attorney requested a meeting with police, authorities said.

During that meeting, Tim implicated his wife in Ricky's death. Information he provided led police to Ricky's remains about 15 miles from their Williamston home, Joy said.

Joy, who was on the scene at the Dansville State Game Area when Ricky's remains were recovered, said he hasn't slept much since then.

"All I can see is the remains just lying there," he said. "It keeps running through my head. ... It's not a typical homicide."

Staff writer Hugh Leach contributed to this report. Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Tips for parents explaining news to young children

Laurie Baumer, executive director of Ele's Place, a Lansing center for grieving children, said parents should watch for any change in their child's behavior that may indicate a deeper problem in reaction to news of 7-year-old Ricky Holland's death.

Although Ricky was home-schooled, Ruth Sills, principal of Williamston's Discovery Elementary School, said district administrators may meet to discuss how to respond to the tragic news.

Baumer gave these tips to keep in mind:

- Answer questions honestly, but leave out gruesome details.
- Reassure children that this is a very unusual situation and that they are safe.
- Limit the child's exposure to television and the news, which tend to offer details children could find troubling.
- Use words such as "has died" and "is dead" as opposed to "passed away" or "went away."
- Consider commemorating Ricky's life in some way.

— Hannah Northey, Hugh Leach

For help

- Ele's Place offers bereavement support groups for children, teens and young adults grieving the death of a family member or close friend.
- For information: call 482-1315.

Published January 28, 2006

Police: Ricky is dead, parents to be charged

By Kevin Grasha and T.M. Shultz
Lansing State Journal

MASON - Ricky Holland is dead, police said Friday.

Tim and Lisa Holland of Williamston were arrested Friday in connection with the disappearance and death of their adopted 7-year-old son, six months after they reported him missing.

Both provided personal knowledge about what happened to Ricky, said Ingham County Sheriff Gene Wriggelsworth.

"What appears to be human remains were located at a rural location in Ingham County," Wriggelsworth said. He would not specify where.

An autopsy will be conducted at Sparrow Hospital to determine whether the remains are Ricky's. An anthropologist will assist because of the condition of the remains.

The Hollands are being held in Ingham County Jail and are expected to be arraigned today on unspecified charges. A deputy at the jail would not relay a message seeking comment from the Hollands. Tim Holland's attorney did not return multiple phone calls seeking comment.

Lisa Holland's new attorney, Andrew Abood, said his client is innocent.

"The biggest break in this case are the accusations being made by her husband," Abood said Friday night. "And based upon the accusations he made earlier in the week and what I know about the case to date, I would say he is not a credible witness.

"We think in the end it's not going to be enough."

Lisa Holland was arrested Wednesday on charges she assaulted her husband.

Neil Rockind, the attorney who had represented the couple since the summer, said he quit earlier this week because Tim had given information about Lisa to the police and Lisa had provided information about Tim.

Rockind said at that point he felt he could no longer effectively represent them.

"The idea that they could harm their own child is" hard to believe, he said. "I hope it isn't true."

It is unclear how long it will take to identify the remains and determine the cause of death.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said he could not discuss the investigation or comment on the evidence.

"I think ultimately, the charges will have to wait until the outcome of the autopsy," he said.

The case took a dramatic turn Friday afternoon when Tim Holland and his attorney, Dennis Hurst, met with authorities to "discuss information pertaining to Ricky Holland's disappearance," Wriggelsworth said.

Ricky was 7 when he disappeared in July 2005. The case sparked a massive search and national publicity that yielded few clues over the next several months.

Relatives are caring for the couple's four other children, Wriggelsworth said.

Ricky's biological mother, Casey Jo Gann, could not be located Friday night for comment.

Joanne Putman, who lives two doors down from the Hollands, said neighbors weren't surprised to learn the couple had been arrested.

"We kind of had that feeling," she said. "We're not really shocked; we're just sad."

Webberville parent Dee Varesi remembers how hot and miserable it was in July when she spent days helping in the search for Ricky and how eager everyone was to find him.

"I think it's crap that the parents let people go through that," Varesi said. "But I'm still glad I looked. I don't feel I wasted my time. We might have found him."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com. Contact T.M. Shultz at 377-1061 or tshultz@lsj.com.

Timeline of Ricky's disappearance

- July 1: Ricky is last reported seen at bedtime at his Williamston home.
- July 2: Ricky is reported missing to authorities.
- July 3: A nationwide Amber Alert is issued. A command center is set up.
- July 4: 600 volunteers spend the holiday searching for the child.
- July 11: Investigators check out three possible sightings in cornfields near Williamston.
- July 13: The Deliver Me Home program mails 65,000 cards with Ricky's photo. A \$5,000 reward is donated.
- July 15: The search for Ricky turns up an adult corpse near Swartz Creek.
- July 16: "America's Most Wanted" airs a clip on Ricky.
- July 17: Investigators check out three tips after the national TV exposure.
- Aug. 12: The Ingham County Sheriff's Office, with help from Michigan State University's anthropology department, digs up a dog's remains in the Holland's back yard.
- Sept. 6: Ingham County sheriff's officials seize the Hollands' cars and home computer, and search their house.
- Oct. 4: Police take a bed comforter from the Holland home, the Hollands' attorney says.
- Oct. 14: Authorities take hair samples and fingerprints from Tim and Lisa Holland, their attorney says.
- Nov. 8: A five-hour search of Ella Sharp Park in Jackson by 40 law enforcement officers fails to turn up any clues in Ricky's disappearance.
- Thursday: Lisa Holland is arraigned on charges of assaulting her husband. She posts bond and faces four years in prison if convicted. Also, police for the first time classify both Lisa and Tim Holland as suspects in Ricky's disappearance.
- Friday: Lisa and Tim Holland are arrested in connection with the disappearance and death of Ricky.

Adoptive Parents Arrested In Boy's Disappearance

Human Remains Found In Rural Area

POSTED: 9:11 am EST January 28, 2006

The adoptive parents of a Williamston boy who was missing since July were arraigned Saturday on obstruction of justice charges a day after remains of his body were found.

Tim Holland, 36, and Lisa Holland, 33, also were being held as material witnesses in each other's cases. The Hollands were arrested separately Friday and each was jailed in lieu of \$5,000 bond on an obstruction charge and in lieu of \$1 million bond as witnesses, the Ingham County Sheriff's Office said.

Ricky Holland was 7 when he vanished last summer. The sheriff's office said Saturday that human remains found Friday in a rural section of Ingham County were positively identified as that of the boy.

The identification was made by forensic anthropologists using dental records, the sheriff's office said.

Andrew Abood, Lisa Holland's attorney, said his client maintains her innocence in Ricky's disappearance.

"Obviously she's devastated by the whole thing. There's been a tremendous change in her lifestyle ... a lot has been uncovered and disclosed and it's shocking and upsetting," he said. "And she's been taken away from her family."

Authorities on Saturday searched the Hollands' home and blocked off their dead-end street, the Lansing State Journal reported on its Web site. The house has been surrounded by yellow police tape since Friday night.

Abood said Lisa Holland faces a Feb. 7 pretrial and a Feb. 9 preliminary exam.

Her husband's next court date was not immediately available.

A felony obstruction charge carries a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison and up to a \$10,000 fine.

Tim Holland and his lawyer had requested a meeting Friday with Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III and state and county law enforcement officials. The remains were found afterward.

Ingham County Sheriff Gene Wriggelsworth on Friday said both Lisa Holland and Tim Holland had provided personal knowledge concerning Ricky's disappearance and death.

Messages seeking comment were left Saturday with Dunnings' office and Tim Holland's attorney, Dennis Hurst.

Ricky Holland disappeared from his house about 15 miles east of Lansing over the Fourth of July holiday weekend. Police and volunteers searched roadways up to 5 miles from the boy's home and lakes, ponds and rivers. Detectives, dive teams and K-9 units were on call to check any new leads.

The case was featured on the TV program "America's Most Wanted" in July.

During the early days of the search, authorities said they suspected the boy ran away from home. He had run away before, but never for that long.

The other Holland children were staying with relatives after their parents were arrested, the sheriff said.

Parents shocked baby's death was linked to sexual assault

Saturday, January 28, 2006

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

SHELBY -- The other day, 22-month-old Jacob Gonzalez pointed to his baby brother's photograph on the refrigerator and smiled.

"Bastian."

That is how he knew Sebastian, who was 5 months old, smiled a lot and loved to play with his feet.

He doesn't understand that Sebastian is gone, said his parents, who said they don't know how to tell him.

His parents, Jaime Gonzalez and Samantha Trout, both 20, say they were told by police that a man they trusted to baby-sit their boys sexually assaulted Sebastian.

The assault caused internal injuries, leading to an infection and his death on Dec. 12, police said. Shelby Police Chief Robert Wilson said he expects to meet with Oceana County prosecutors next week to discuss possible charges.

He refused to identify the suspect, saying only he was an acquaintance of the family.

The parents said they were told by police not to identify the man. They said he baby-sat their boys twice in the couple's apartment above The Brown Bear restaurant, each time for about an hour.

Police said tests indicate the baby was sexually assaulted a day or two before he died, and that it may not have been the only time he was sexually abused. An autopsy showed the baby died from septicemia, an infection resulting from "penetrating blunt trauma" to the infant's rectal area.

Medical tests showed the older brother was not sexually assaulted, police and his parents said.

An investigation cleared the parents of the homicide, police said.

Children's Protective Services took custody of Jacob after the death and have allowed him to stay at his maternal grandmother's house pending the investigation, the mother said.

"They say that we let it happen once, so who's to say we won't let it happen again," Trout said.

The parents, however, said they had no idea their child was in danger.

Gonzalez and Trout were raising the boys in an apartment atop a narrow staircase.

She worked at a temporary factory job; he was unemployed, but was learning to fix computers at a friend's repair shop, he said.

Sebastian already could stand in his bouncy seat and was about ready to start crawling, his mother said. He often found a way to pull his feet from his pajamas so he could play with his toes.

"He was always babbling," she said. "Instead of crying to wake you up in the morning, he'd be playing."

Gonzalez said he would wake up to find Sebastian in his playpen, which was next to his parents' bed.

"He'd have a big old smile," he said.

Jacob gave Sebastian toys during the baby's "tummy time" on the floor, and liked to push him in his toy swing.

on the morning of Dec. 12, the apartment was strangely quiet, Gonzalez said. Trout was at work, Jacob was still sleeping, and Sebastian wasn't babbling.

Gonzalez said he found Sebastian face-up in his portable playpen. His skin was blue.

He said he called 911 and tried CPR for 10 to 15 minutes until paramedics arrived. The parents said they were told their son likely died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

The day before visitation, police told them he had been sexually assaulted, the mother said.

"I could never believe someone could do that, especially to someone so little," she said. "I think I was in denial for a while."

Trout said she and Gonzalez are trying to get Jacob back.

She said she still hears Sebastian on some nights.

Monday, January 30, 2006

Detroit News Wayne Briefs

Canton Township

Suspect in baby slaying has his exam delayed

A preliminary examination of evidence against a 23-year-old Canton Township man accused of killing his girlfriend's 8-month-old son has been postponed until March 2. Friday's scheduled district court hearing for Carlee Hines Jr. was canceled at his attorney's request. Hines is charged with felony murder for the Jan. 10 death of Eryck Fossett.

Father pleads guilty to abusing son

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, January 30, 2006

By Paul Janczewski

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Journal.com • 810.766.6333

Carleton O. Grant admits that, on at least two occasions, he became violent after arguing with the mother of his four children.

And, he said, he took out the brunt of his anger on his own infants.

Grant, 24, of Flint pleaded guilty to one count of first degree child abuse, a 15-year felony.

The plea stems from separate incidents in which Grant injured his 3-month-old son, Kentrell McMillian, in 2000, and then his 5-week-old son, Jacarion Grant, in July.

In both instances, Grant said, he shook the children and violently threw them down on a couch.

"I was mad at (Chanel McMillian, the babies' mother)," Grant said.

Genesee Circuit Judge Richard B. Yuille scheduled a Feb. 21 sentencing for Grant, who is being held in the Genesee County Jail on a \$100,000 cash bond.

Jacarion was admitted to Hurley Medical Center in critical condition on July 4 with a swollen face, bleeding on his brain, a fractured wrist and six fractured ribs. Grant admitted to police that he "went too far" with the baby, and said he struck him with a thrown baby bottle and raked his fingernails across the boy's face.

During a police interview about the baby's injuries, Grant told Flint police Sgt. Jowanne Carrigan about a Nov. 25, 2000, incident involving Kentrell. Police investigated that case but no charges were filed.

Both children have recovered from their injuries and are now in foster care.

Protective Services has removed all four children from the couple, who were involved in Probate Court proceedings over neglect and loss of parental rights, according to testimony from earlier hearings and court records.

Parent to Parent matches mentors with adults who have children with special needs

Monday, January 30, 2006

schourey@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8575

When Trina Wood's now 6-year-old son Connor was diagnosed with autism at age 2, she wasn't sure what to do.

She turned to Parent to Parent of Southwest Michigan, an organization that supports families with special-needs children, from the first diagnosis of an impairment through their 18th birthdays.

After years of involvement with Parent to Parent and help from a mentor parent matched to her, Wood's frustrations have eased. She still calls the group for tips on things such as where to sign her son up for basketball and summer camp.

Connor has many sensory-related problems. "If we're in the grocery store, he might be holding his ears and screaming, and people might look at him and say, 'What's wrong with your kid?'" she said. "They look at you like you're a terrible parent."

Parent to Parent brings families in similar situations together to share expertise gained from dealing first-hand with challenges of raising children with special needs.

The organization, which has an annual budget of about \$100,000, has about 90 trained parent mentors and more than 100 volunteers. It has received grants from Community Mental Health, the Bronson Healthcare Foundation, the Michigan Department of Education and the Children's Trust Fund, among others.

Director Michelle Miller, who has an 11-year-old daughter with Down syndrome, knows what it's like to adjust to the reality that your child is different.

"When you have a child with special needs, you become part of this special club you never thought you'd want to be a part of," she said. "But after you get there, you get your values and priorities straight in a hurry."

The No. 1 challenge in raising a child with an impairment is "trying to take in all the information you're bombarded with," she said.

"It's overwhelming. You hear it as you're ready for it."

Parent to Parent helps people navigate the health-care system, schools, extracurricular activities and other outlets that can make their children's lives as close to normal as possible. Families served by the organization have children with a variety of neurological problems, such as bipolar disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, Tourette syndrome, ADD, ADHD, and cognitive impairment such as Down syndrome.

Parent to Parent organizes the Kalamazoo Parent Network, a monthly event with guest speakers, an annual benefit called the Autism Awareness Walk, the All Kids Can Recreation Expo, and a spring plant-sale fund-raiser. It reaches out to community organizations and businesses to coax them into serving children with impairments.

Since its inception in 1998, Miller estimates Parent to Parent has been involved with 1,100 families. It expects to ramp up outreach to minority families and increase involvement with Western Michigan University, assisting with teacher training and speaking to special-education and general-education classes.

A Struggle to Aid Children in an Office Full of Quarrels

By MIKE McINTIRE
The New York Times

Published: January 29, 2006

As abuse complaints poured into a city child welfare office in Brooklyn, one caseworker stashed files for 17 unresolved cases in her desk drawer, where they languished for weeks. Supervisors were lax in reviewing cases or even keeping records. When they did look over case files, some backdated their entries to cover up the delay.

These revelations and others — of employees distracted from their jobs protecting children by a workplace filled with name-calling and vendettas — surfaced in a recent disciplinary hearing for a supervisor with the city's Administration for Children's Services. And while they speak of events three years ago in a single office, they provide a close-up of the kinds of troubles that have plagued some of the agency's busiest offices.

Since November, three children whose families had dealings with employees in the agency's Brooklyn offices have died, including 7-year-old Nixzmary Brown, who was found beaten to death on Jan. 11 despite repeated warnings to caseworkers that she was being abused. The girl's death has sparked a major reorganization of the agency and an infusion of city money and personnel to bolster child protection.

The Downtown Brooklyn office in the disciplinary hearing was not involved in those three cases, agency officials said. Yet the administrative law judge who heard the complaint said it was just luck that "nothing catastrophic resulted" from the failure to pursue the cases whose files were found stuffed in a desk in 2003.

"These 17 cases involve the welfare of children," wrote the judge, Kara J. Miller, "and should not have been overlooked or forgotten." In her Jan. 5 ruling, the judge admonished the employees, saying they needed to focus on the "administration's critical mandate of helping children in need, rather than diverting their time and energy by engaging in negative and unproductive disagreements."

Judge Miller also recommended that the supervisor, Andre Springer, who works for the agency's child-protective division, be suspended without pay for 45 days.

The office, on Adams Street, oversees a broad swath of western Brooklyn, from Brooklyn Heights to Park Slope to Bensonhurst. According to court records, agency officials accused Mr. Springer, who supervised caseworkers investigating educational neglect, of failing to monitor cases, verbally abusing an employee and insubordination.

The agency also said that Mr. Springer had not maintained written records of his activities, including the mandatory monitoring of progress on cases. A manager in the office, Almarie Buddington, testified that "several other supervisors do not complete the reviews in a timely manner and that entries are frequently backdated" in the system that tracks cases, the judge wrote.

Sharman Stein, a spokeswoman for the Administration for Children's Services, said that the agency had initiated proceedings to fire Mr. Springer, but that Judge Miller had upheld only some of the charges against him and recommended the suspension instead.

"That recommendation was just recently received," she said. "It is now up to the commissioner to review all the facts and make his own determination on penalty."

Antonia Kousoulas, a lawyer for Mr. Springer, declined to comment. Mr. Springer was removed from supervisory duties, Ms. Stein said; he now works in an office in Bedford-Stuyvesant and is not involved in child protection. No one else in the downtown office was disciplined, Ms. Stein said.

The judge's decision came less than a week before Nixxmary Brown was found dead in her family's Bedford-Stuyvesant apartment, where the authorities say she had been abused by her stepfather. John B. Mattingly, the agency commissioner, has said that caseworkers failed to aggressively investigate complaints that the girl was being mistreated.

It was not the first time the Administration for Children's Services, and its Brooklyn operation in particular, has stood accused of mishandling a case. Studies dating to 1996, as well as accounts of former agency officials, have portrayed the Brooklyn offices as hobbled by low morale, poor managers and high turnover.

In the early 1990's, prosecutors found, child welfare officials fraudulently collected millions of dollars in federal funds by filing reports that falsely claimed that they had provided required foster-care services.

The managerial problems in Brooklyn appear to extend beyond the child-protection division, the focus of much of the recent turmoil. Last April, another administrative judge criticized the agency for failing to report that a teenager in foster care had gone missing from one of its group homes for two weeks, until he turned up dead on subway tracks.

More recently, an employee in the agency's legal division in Brooklyn was accused of failing to complete assignments and engaging in disruptive behavior, including shooting a rubber band at her boss and loudly accusing supervisors of being a "bunch of back-stabbing, throat-cutting, anti-Italian pigs," court records show. The employee was suspended for 15 days in October.

Another employee, in the child services division in Brooklyn, was accused of failing to complete work on 10 case files and of being insubordinate, drawing a 30-day suspension in September.

In Mr. Springer's case, Judge Miller noted that he had received good evaluations during his 18 years as a city child-welfare worker, and that he had never been disciplined before. She said many of the problems appeared to stem from his personal disputes with other employees.

Among the accusations was that Mr. Springer and Eugenia Amobi, the caseworker who put the files in her desk, engaged in a loud argument that began when Ms. Amobi called him an idiot, Judge Miller wrote. According to Ms. Amobi, Mr. Springer then called her a fat cow and "an African monkey," an accusation Mr. Springer denied.

He testified that he believed that Ms. Amobi had hidden the files to make him look bad. Ms. Amobi insisted she was not trying to hide them, a claim that the judge found not credible. Ms. Amobi is on personal leave, agency officials said; attempts to reach her at home and at her office were unsuccessful.

State registry expands protection of children

Web-posted Jan 30, 2006

By ANN ZANIEWSKI
Of The Oakland Press

ROCHESTER HILLS - Parents have more ways to keep obscene messages from the eyes of their tech-savvy kids.

Michigan's Protect MI Child Registry was expanded this month to include Instant Messenger IDs and mobile text messaging and fax numbers, to which minors have access, on a list of contacts prohibited from receiving information about products or services that are illegal for minors, such as alcohol, gambling and pornography.

"This is a tool for parents and others to reduce the amount of these messages that minors have access to," said Judy Palnau, spokeswoman for the Michigan Public Service Commission.

Parents began adding e-mail addresses to the registry July 1, though a glitch in the legislation's language prevented compliance enforcement for about four months.

More than 3,000 contact points are now registered.

Senders of unwanted information can be charged with a misdemeanor, for a first offense, or a felony. Palnau said the penalty can be up to three years in jail and fines of up to \$30,000.

She said civil penalties can reach \$5,000 per message sent up to a maximum of \$250,000 per day.

State Sen. Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, introduced the legislation that created the Michigan Children's Protection Registry Act.

"We're really one of the first in the country to have one," he said.

Bishop said the registry allows the state attorney general's office to prosecute violators because it affords it jurisdiction even if the messages originate out of state.

Melissia Christianson, spokeswoman for the attorney general's office, said that from Nov. 16 to Dec. 13, 293 complaints were logged. State attorneys are investigating the 32 that met criteria and another 22 that were questionable.

Next to each contact point, there's a space to note birthdate of the youngest child with access to it. The service expires when he or she turns 18.

Schools can also enlist. Complaints are filed online.

Though the registry can shield cell phones from unwanted text messages, it does not protect cell phones or land line phones from calls. Palnau said that's the job of the national do-not-call registry.

Sue Thomasson of Rochester Hills said her three children, ages 13, 17 and 19, receive unwanted messages almost daily in their e-mail accounts. She registered their e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers.

"I think any way that we can protect our kids from unwanted and unsolicited advertisements is a good thing as a parent," she said.

Anne Smith's 10- and 13-year-old daughters use Instant Messenger, an Internet tool that lets them chat with friends.

Smith plans to lead a March seminar for Rochesterarea parents called "The Dark Side of the Web." She said high schoolers, middle schoolers and now even children in elementary school have access to an array of technology that is useful but can open the door for potential harm. She said the registry would be helpful.

"I know people who stand behind their children and watch what they're doing, but you can't do that all the time," she said.

Monday, January 30, 2006

Parents get child support offer 25,000 offered deal: Those who pay custodial parent full amount will get break on what's owed to the state.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Some 25,000 Michigan parents who owe back child support to the state are being offered a onetime deal starting this week: pay off 25 percent of your debt, and the state will forgive the rest.

The Michigan Department of Human Services is making the offer to people who stopped paying child support while the custodial parent received cash welfare benefits.

But there's a catch: the parents must also pay 100 percent of the back child support owed to the custodial parent, and their children must already have reached age 18.

Those who take advantage of the deal, which runs Feb. 1 to April 30, can close their case and pay off their custodial parent while the state gets its due, too. "We consider this to be a win for everybody," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the state Office of Child Support.

But not everyone agrees this is a good program.

Shelley Mitchell, who says her ex-husband owes her children \$20,000, wishes the state would figure out how to collect full child support so it wouldn't have to offer such programs.

"They keep doing things to make it easier for the noncustodial parent to get out of having to pay off their child support," said Mitchell, who lives near Flint. "Fix the problem. Don't put a Band-Aid on an artery that's bleeding."

A total of 250,000 people in Michigan owe nearly \$9 billion in back child support. Some of it is owed to custodial parents but about half of the arrearage amount is owed to the state, according to Stephen. It would take the state at least 23 years to collect all that money, she said.

The people who are being offered this opportunity owe \$380 million to the state. Many of these cases are 15 years old and average about \$14,000.

The state has set a goal of collecting \$18 million, largely because officials don't expect to collect all that is owed. Some of the money collected will be returned to the federal government, which helps support the program, but what remains will be used to improve the state's child support computer system.

The state could also earn more federal incentives because those increase when the state collects more back child support. In 2004, Michigan received \$27 million from the federal government related to child support collection efforts.

Stephen is unaware of any other state that has offered this program. But it is the first of many steps that the state will take to try and reduce future arrearages.

It comes on the heels of another program the state recently offered to help reduce its growing back child support, known as a child support amnesty arrearage. That program, which ran October through December, offered parents an opportunity to avoid civil sanctions if they paid off their back child support during those months.

But parents and activists called it a program for the rich because most of the parents could not come up with the money to pay off back child support.

The state did not have a tally last week of the number of people who participated. Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan was unaware of the specifics of the latest program but she is currently serving on a national task force investigating child support arrearages.

"We need to get at reducing arrearages in Michigan," said Corrigan, "so we can ensure more support goes to children who need it."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Child support

Beginning Feb. 1, Michigan parents will be given a onetime opportunity to clear 75 percent of their back child support owed to the state.

How much past-due support does a parent have to pay?

25 percent of past-due support owed to the state.

100 percent of past-due support owed to a custodial parent or another state.

100 percent of past-due fees owed to Friend of the Court.

Deadline is April 30.

Call (866) 540-0008.

Source: State of Michigan

State To Forgive Some Parents Of Child Support Debt

Deal Would Affect About 25,000 Michigan Parents

POSTED: 8:01 am EST January 30, 2006

The Michigan Department of Human Services is offering thousands of parents who owe back child support a break that would forgive 75 percent of their state debt.

The deal would affect about 25,000 Michigan parents who stopped paying support while their former spouses received cash welfare benefits.

The deal requires the delinquent parents to pay 25 percent of the back child support owed to the state, 100 percent of the back child support owed to former spouses and 100 percent of fees owed to the friend of the court. Their children must be 18 or older.

The program starts Wednesday and runs through April 30.

Marilyn Stephen, director of the Department of Human Service's Office of Child Support, said she knows of no other state that has offered a similar program.

Across the state, 250,000 people owe nearly \$9 billion in back child support.

While some is owed to former spouses, about half is owed to the state, Stephen said.

She said it would take the state at least 23 years to collect that amount.

Those being offered the break owe an average of about \$14,000 each and many have owed for 15 years.

The state's goal is to collect \$18 million.

A portion of money collected will be used to improve the state's child support computer system.

The rest will go to the federal government.

If the program is successful, the state could stand to earn more federal incentives, which increase as the state collects more back child support.

It comes on the heels of another incentive that ran from October to December and allowed those who paid child support debt to avoid criminal and civil penalties.

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MIRS

January 27, 2006

Granholt's Health Care Proposal In Committee

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**'s proposal to get health care to 555,000 of the one million residents who don't have health care, will be taken up in a joint Senate committee 2 p.m. Wednesday.

Granholt announced her Michigan Health Care First Health Care Plan, which depends on \$500-\$600 million in federal health care money, during her State of the State address. Shortly after her address, Senate Majority Leader Ken **SIKKEMA** (R-Wyoming) and Speaker of the House Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Novi) told the media they would give all of Granholt's new proposals a fair look.

True to their word, at least for the moment, the insurance proposals will go before a joint committee chaired by Sen. Bev. **HAMMERSTROM** (R-Temperance). Members of the Senate Health Policy and the Senate Department of Community Health Appropriations Subcommittee Committee are invited to attend.

Dept. of Community Health will give a presentation to demonstrate the role it will play in the program, why the program's necessary and how much it will cost. The meeting will be a couple of hours long and will not include public testimony.

And as far as the governor's other proposals, "We're looking at those proposals and will start assigning them to committees," said Sikkema Spokesman Ari **ADLER**.

Those proposals include the governor's pledge to help small businesses provide 401K plans for their employees and reforming insurance.

Meanwhile, *MIRS* checked out a rumor that has been circulating in and around the capitol that Michigan Blue Cross Blue Shield would help foot part of the bill for the program to the tune of some \$330 million.

But Helen **STOJIC**, spokesperson for Blue Cross, Blue Shield, told *MIRS* today that Blue Cross is awaiting the detail of the Governor's plan just like almost everyone else.

"We are looking forward to seeing the details of the plan," Stojic said. "We've always been supportive of expanding access for the uninsured. What we've heard about this so far involves drawing down federal money. But, basically, we're waiting for more details."

Stamas to co-chair hearing on health insurance proposal

Stuart Frohm, Midland Daily News

01/27/2006

"A lot of genuine questions" exist about the proposed Michigan First Health Care Plan after Gov. Jennifer Granholm's State of the State speech, Midland Republican state Sen. Tony Stamas said Thursday.

Stamas plans to co-chair a legislative hearing at 1 p.m. Wednesday, seeking answers about Granholm's proposal to use state and federal money to help about 550,000 uninsured people get insurance from a private company.

Among the questions is what the Michigan First plan would mean "to individuals currently receiving services," Stamas said.

The state's \$400 million share of the plan's \$1 billion cost would come from money the state now pays hospitals and clinics who treat the uninsured, state Community Health director Janet Olszewski said.

To get the other \$600,000, the state asked the federal government for a waiver to use federal money that has been saved by changing the state's Medicaid prescription drug and fee-for-service plans to less costly alternatives.

Granholm said Michigan First would cover small business employees who aren't covered through work or Medicaid, plus self-employed people who can't otherwise afford to buy a private plan.

Financial reality caused three other states' similar plans to crash and burn, said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming.

Stamas is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on the Department of Community Health budget.

He said he suggested a joint hearing to Sen. Majority Floor Leader Bev Hammerstrom, R-Monroe County, who is chairperson of the Senate Committee on Health Policy.

Hammerstrom also is vice chairperson of the Families and Human Services and Government Operations committees.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Copyright 2006 Associated Press.

Our View: Insurance proposal should get hard look and a fair hearing

If the Michigan First Health Care Plan becomes reality, Gov. Jennifer Granholm says Michigan would become the state with the highest percentage of its population insured.

The state's economic and budget problems might make the proposal sound like nothing more than this campaign tactic: Granholm tries to help Michigan's needy; and if the plan isn't funded, she can blame the Bush administration, or Republican state lawmakers, or both.

But her proposal could be much more than a ploy. And Midland Republican state Sen. Tony Stamas will be in a key position to find out.

He is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on the Department of Community Health. And he is to co-chair a legislative hearing on the proposal on Wednesday. Stamas, on Thursday said "a lot of genuine questions" remain about the Michigan First proposal. Among them is the impact on people served by current programs.

The proposed program would cost \$1 billion, with Michigan paying \$400 million and the federal government paying the rest.

To get most of the money, the state asked the federal government for a waiver to use \$600 million in federal money that has been saved by changing the state's Medicaid prescription drug and fee-for-service plans to less costly alternatives.

The state's share would come from money the state now pays hospitals and clinics who treat the uninsured, state Community Health director Janet Olszewski said.

Granholm said Michigan First would cover small business employees who aren't covered through work and don't qualify for Medicaid, plus self-employed people who can't otherwise afford to buy a private plan.

Her plan, she said, would provide a low-cost plan through a private insurance company. But financial reality caused three other states' similar plans to crash and burn, said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming.

At the root of much of the talk about state taxation, spending and jobs in the private sector has been what we'll call the argument about whether the chicken or the egg comes first.

Republicans talk about the importance of attracting and keeping taxpaying businesses and jobs by cutting or eliminating taxes and unnecessary obstacles.

Granholm has voiced concerns about potential impact of tax-cut proposals on state services. And she says she won't support business tax breaks that would shift the burden to everyday citizens or force cuts to education and health care.

Weighing the impact of the proposed health insurance plan, proposed tax cuts and the needs of Michigan's most vulnerable residents is an important job. Democrats and Republicans need to ask the right questions based on the best available information and the public interest, not narrow partisan interests or unexamined ideology.

Realists shouldn't expect politicians to forget about upcoming elections.

And politicians shouldn't expect voters to be blinded by rhetoric.

Results matter.

<http://www.ourmidlandforums.com/http://www.ourmidlandforums.com/>

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The Next Policy Bungle?

The Washington Post

Monday, January 30, 2006; Page A16

PRESIDENT BUSH'S State of the Union speech tomorrow night looks set to address health care. Mr. Bush is choosing a ripe topic: The United States spends almost twice as large a share of its economy on health as other rich countries do, yet it still has lower life expectancy and 46 million uninsured people. Some of his team's thinking is good but not entirely new. For example, both Medicare and private insurers are beginning to reward doctors and hospitals that score well on measures of quality and cost-effectiveness. Other administration ideas are good if done the right way, such as caps on doctors' liability. But the president's team is also enthusiastic about the trend toward out-of-pocket payments, which it sees as a way of driving down health costs. Its enthusiasm is misguided.

The theory behind out-of-pocket payments is that patients who pay their bills themselves will shop carefully. This is likely to hold true some of the time but not most of it. Most consumers aren't equipped to distinguish between good medical service and bad; the results of poor service show up only after they've paid for it. A minority of motivated consumers may do the research necessary to judge whether a doctor's advice is sound, but even this minority can't be expected to start poring over medical journals when they are hit by a medical emergency -- and emergencies account for a large chunk of health spending.

Indeed, in many cases the doctors themselves can't be expected to know how much treatment will cost until after the fact. They admit a patient, perform some tests; those tests lead to new tests, and so on. So even if the White House could conjure superhero patients who assiduously researched their options even when in pain, the superheroes couldn't discover what sort of bill they faced before they checked into a hospital.

Nor is that all. No vision of consumer-driven health care assumes that all payments will be out of pocket; above a certain ceiling, insurance would take over. There are limits to how high that ceiling can be. People may be expected to pay \$3,000 or \$5,000 a year, perhaps a little more if they are affluent. But many medical procedures cost more than any of those ceilings, so the incentive to economize vanishes. Meanwhile, advocates of consumer-driven health care tend to argue that people with chronic diseases deserve a special break; they are faced with large bills that aren't discretionary, so they shouldn't have to pay them out of pocket. But if chronic care and procedures costing more than \$5,000 aren't going to be disciplined by consumers, the gains from consumer-driven care can be only limited. They are unlikely to justify the harshness of forcing people to pay for health out of pocket -- or the risk that people will cut back on preventive drugs and so boost health costs in the long run.

If the White House is determined to go down this road, it should at least rethink the tax incentives it uses. To encourage out-of-pocket payments, the administration wants to give them the same tax treatment as health insurance costs, which employers are allowed to deduct. Since the object here is to restrain America's extraordinary rate of medical spending, ending the tax deductibility of insurance so that all health spending comes out of post-tax dollars would be

logical. But the administration wants to go the other way, allowing all health spending, including out-of-pocket costs, to come out of pretax dollars. This would subsidize medical consumption, deprive the Treasury of revenue and constitute yet another favor to the affluent: The tax deduction is worth most to people in high tax brackets.

In sum, Mr. Bush may be about to go after the wrong target using the wrong tool. He needs to rethink his strategy.

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Michigan

Hearing will seek details of health plan Granholm proposes billion-dollar strategy to trim by half the number of residents lacking coverage.

Gary Heinlein / The Detroit News

LANSING -- At a public hearing Wednesday, lawmakers will press for details of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's billion-dollar strategy to cut in half the number of Michigan residents who lack health insurance coverage.

Granholm unveiled the proposal in her annual State of the State address last week, saying it would "make Michigan the state with the highest percentage of its population insured." The goal: provide coverage to 500,000 low-income residents by giving them state-issued health care cards. The ambitious plan was the centerpiece of Granholm's fourth State of the State message. Leaders of the Republican legislative majority expressed skepticism, particularly when the governor said the goal could be reached without new taxes. They promised to wait for more details, however, before passing judgment.

Granholm told The Detroit News her plan would cost \$1 billion, but that would be made up by shifting \$400 million from other state programs and obtaining \$600 million from the federal government.

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, noted that Medicaid, the government-sponsored health care program for the poor, is the state's fastest-growing expense. It costs \$7 billion a year in state and federal funds.

"To suggest we're going to spend another billion on (health coverage) we're going to have some questions," Sikkema said. House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, said he would rather lower business taxes, which would help firms create new jobs so people could get company-sponsored coverage or pay health care bills on their own.

Sikkema added that three other states -- Tennessee, Illinois and Maine -- have attempted and abandoned plans like Granholm is pursuing.

She wants to provide health insurance for those who earn less than a federal poverty level income, yet aren't among the 1.5 million Michiganians covered under Medicaid. Under her proposal, recipients would share in the cost if they make more than the poverty-level income. Here's an example of how it would work: Those at or below the federal poverty level income of \$18,850 for a family of four would pay nothing; the amount recipients contribute would rise with their income to the cutoff point, \$37,700 for a family of four.

State Health Director Janet Olszewski said a million state residents don't have health care coverage. She told The News that the state can't afford to pick up the tab for all of them right now.

Wednesday's hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m. in the Senate Hearing Room, first floor, Boji Tower.

Budget to Hurt Poor People on Medicaid, Report Says

By ROBERT PEAR
The New York Times

Published: January 30, 2006

WASHINGTON, Jan. 29 — Millions of low-income people would have to pay more for health care under a bill worked out by Congress, and some of them would forgo care or drop out of Medicaid because of the higher co-payments and premiums, the Congressional Budget Office says in a new report.

The Senate has already approved the measure, the first major effort to rein in federal benefit programs in eight years, and the House is expected to vote Wednesday, clearing the bill for President Bush.

In his State of the Union address on Tuesday, Mr. Bush plans to recommend a variety of steps to help people obtain health insurance and cope with rising health costs. But the bill, the Deficit Reduction Act, written by Congress over the last year with support from the White House, could reduce coverage and increase the number of uninsured, the budget office said.

Over all, the bill is estimated to save \$38.8 billion in the next five years and \$99.3 billion from 2006 to 2015, with cuts in student loans, crop subsidies and many other programs, the budget office said. Medicaid and Medicare account for half of the savings, 27 percent and 23 percent over 10 years.

The report gives Democrats new ammunition to attack the bill. But they appear unlikely to defeat it, since the House approved a nearly identical version of the legislation by a vote of 212 to 206 on Dec. 19.

Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa, said the bill was needed because Medicaid had been growing at an unsustainable rate.

But Senator Jeff Bingaman, Democrat of New Mexico, said the budget office report confirmed that the bill would "cut access to care for some of our most vulnerable citizens."

The bill gives states sweeping new authority to charge premiums and co-payments under Medicaid.

"In response to the new premiums, some beneficiaries would not apply for Medicaid, would leave the program or would become ineligible due to nonpayment," the Congressional Budget Office said in its report, completed Friday night. "C.B.O. estimates that about 45,000 enrollees would lose coverage in fiscal year 2010 and that 65,000 would lose coverage in fiscal year 2015 because of the imposition of premiums. About 60 percent of those losing coverage would be children."

The budget office predicted that 13 million low-income people, about a fifth of Medicaid recipients, would face new or higher co-payments for medical services like doctor's visits and hospital care.

It said that by 2010 about 13 million low-income people would have to pay more for prescription drugs, and that this number would rise to 20 million by 2015.

"About one-third of those affected would be children, and almost half would be individuals with income below the poverty level," the report said in addressing co-payments for prescription drugs.

Under the bill, states could end Medicaid coverage for people who failed to pay premiums for 60 days or more. Doctors and hospitals could deny services to Medicaid beneficiaries who did not make the required co-payments.

The budget office said the new co-payments would save money by reducing the use of medical services.

"About 80 percent of the savings from higher cost-sharing would be due to decreased use of services," the report said.

The official estimates take into account the fact that "savings from the reduced use of certain services could be partly offset by higher spending in other areas, such as emergency room visits." After talking to federal and state officials and reviewing Medicaid data, analysts at the Congressional Budget Office predicted that states would charge premiums to 1.3 million low-income people and cut benefits for 1.6 million people. Most of the cuts would affect dental, vision and mental health services, it said.

The bill also makes it more difficult for people to qualify for Medicaid coverage of nursing home care by transferring assets to children or other relatives for less than fair market value.

This provision would delay Medicaid eligibility for 120,000 people, or about 15 percent of the new recipients of Medicaid nursing home benefits each year, the budget office said.

Under another provision of the bill, Medicaid would deny coverage of nursing home care to any person with home equity exceeding \$500,000. States could increase the ceiling to \$750,000.

About 2,000 people a year would be denied nursing home benefits because of the cap on home equity, the budget office said.

Taken together, these provisions, requiring people to use more of their own assets to pay for nursing home care, are expected to save the federal government \$6.4 billion over 10 years.

The budget office estimated that 35,000 Medicaid recipients would lose coverage because of new, more stringent requirements for them to prove United States citizenship. Most of those losing coverage would be illegal immigrants, but some would be citizens unable to supply the necessary documents, the report said.

Other provisions of the bill would establish stricter work requirements for welfare recipients and cut federal payments to the states for enforcing child support orders. The cut would save the federal government \$4.1 billion over 10 years, but child support collections would decline as a result, the budget office said.

Health Care, Vexing to Clinton, Is Now at Top of Bush's Agenda

By ROBERT PEAR
The New York Times

Published: January 29, 2006

WASHINGTON, Jan. 28 — More than 12 years after President Bill Clinton unveiled his plan to remake the nation's health care system, President Bush is moving the issue once again to the top of the national agenda and is expected to push a series of health care proposals in his State of the Union address on Tuesday.

Where Mr. Clinton was driven by a desire to guarantee health insurance for every American, Mr. Bush is focusing primarily on health costs, which he says are swamping employers and threatening economic growth. Where Mr. Clinton favored a larger role for government, Mr. Bush has a fundamentally different philosophy, built on the idea that placing more responsibility in the hands of individuals will create market pressure to hold down costs.

The long-running debate has taken on new urgency as more and more companies find themselves struggling to pay for employee health benefits. Health care costs have been a big factor in the troubles of the domestic auto industry, among others.

But some policy experts, Republicans and Democrats alike, say the Bush proposals, which are built around tax breaks, may further drive up health spending and costs by fueling the demand for health care. Such unintended effects show how difficult it is to apply economic theory to the complexities of the current health care system.

By making health care a prominent theme of his prime-time address to the nation, Mr. Bush hopes to regain the initiative on domestic policy. Success with his health care proposals, after the failure of his effort to overhaul Social Security, would allow the president to build political momentum heading into the midterm elections this fall.

The White House has indicated that Mr. Bush will propose tax deductions for out-of-pocket medical expenses, rules to encourage the use of health savings accounts and incentives for small businesses across the country to band together and buy health insurance, exempt from state regulation.

Regina E. Herzlinger, a professor at Harvard Business School, said: "Insuring the uninsured is a fine objective, but how will this control the health costs that are hobbling our global competitiveness? Health savings accounts will increase coverage, and that's great. But they are being touted as a way to control costs, and I very much doubt that claim."

Democrats see the Bush proposals as a pastiche of old and new ideas that falls far short of what is required to tame the explosive growth in health costs.

Many economists say that the tax code, by subsidizing the purchase of health insurance, has fostered excessive use of health care services, driving up costs. Rather than proposing any limit on this subsidy, Mr. Bush wants to make it more widely available, to people who buy health care and insurance on their own.

Under current law, employers who pay health insurance premiums for employees can deduct the payments as a business expense on their tax returns, and the payments are not counted as taxable income for the employees. But such subsidies are unavailable to people who buy insurance themselves. President Bush sees that difference as unfair.

Allan B. Hubbard, assistant to the president for economic policy, said, "Health care purchased by an employer is done on a pretax basis, before your payroll taxes, before your income taxes. If you work for an employer who cannot afford to provide health insurance and so you go out and buy it, you have to use after-tax dollars."

In an interview, Mr. Hubbard continued: "Another unfairness is that if you buy health care with your insurance, you use pretax dollars. If you pay for it out of pocket, you have to use after-tax dollars. That encourages you to insure health care events that are routine. Insurance was never created to deal with the routine."

People use health savings accounts to pay routine medical expenses and buy high-deductible insurance policies to cover larger expenses. Mr. Bush says this arrangement encourages people to take more responsibility for all aspects of their care, including its cost.

"It's the opposite of federal control," Mr. Bush told a group of small-business owners this month. "It is patient control."

HEALTH CARE PLAN RAISES QUESTIONS

There is still a year before Governor Jennifer Granholm hopes to be able to provide health coverage for some 550,000 uninsured residents, but her State of the State address Wednesday left a laundry list of questions for those who might be providing the coverage and those who would have to approve any legislation to enact the program.

Sen. Tony Stamas (R-Midland), whose Senate Appropriations Community Health Subcommittee is planning a hearing on the proposal next week, said he expected a lot of questions from members.

"I think there's a lot of the questions of the details," he said. Among those: "How's it going to commit resources we already have? What types of coverage are they thinking of providing?"

Mr. Stamas said he had not taken a position on the proposal yet because he did not have enough information.

Ms. Granholm reiterated Friday that the plan would not mean an increase in state spending, but would leverage additional federal funds. "As everybody knows, we are low in drawing down federal dollars and this would allow us to offer flexibility in offering a health care plan that is low-cost for uninsured people," she said.

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) had charged that states that have tried similar approaches have seen their plans "crash and burn" in the face of financial reality.

Granholm spokesperson Liz Boyd acknowledged that some of the older plans did so, but only because the states were not willing to sustain them. But she said several other states – all with Republican governors – have obtained federal waivers and are running successful programs, including one in Massachusetts covering those with incomes up to 300 percent of poverty and one in Wisconsin that covers those with incomes up to 200 percent of poverty.

Among the funding options being considered is the current spending on uninsured residents which the administration sees as an avenue to secure federal Medicaid matching funds, Ms. Boyd said.

Rick Murdock with the Michigan Association of Health Plans said the state needs to be sure the federal funds actually are enough to cover the costs of adding new people to the plans.

"We are struggling with the financing through the Medicaid program. We had no increase last year," Mr. Murdock said. "If they're using the Medicaid model as the funding model, that's going to be a struggle because we're struggling with that now."

The benefits provided could also be an issue for the health plans, Mr. Murdock said. In addition to being sure that the premiums paid cover the costs of the new plan members, he said the HMOs were also concerned that the benefits package would match with what they are allowed – or required – to provide.

HMOs have certain minimum services they must cover under state law, and Mr. Murdock said the group would seek waiver of those services if the state's plan does not include them so the HMOs would be able to participate.

Helen Stojic with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan said the state's largest health insurer is waiting for the administration to release more details before even trying to formulate any questions or concerns.

"We certainly support the idea of providing more access to more uninsured," Ms. Stojic said.

Medicaid drug plan 'must be fixed,' Stabenow says

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, January 28, 2006

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll
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FLINT TWP. - Medicare could undergo further tinkering under a bill proposed by U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.

Saying the new program "must be fixed," Stabenow will introduce legislation creating another drug plan, administered by Medicare, with a standard benefit package and set co-payments.

"This doesn't dismantle the current policy," she told pharmacists, doctors and seniors at a Flint Township pharmacy. "The new policy dismantled Medicare."

Seniors could begin using new Medicare drug benefits Jan. 1. But the program's start has been rocked by missing enrollment information, and seniors have been told they owe more in co-payments than they're supposed to pay.

"I can spend up to 45 minutes waiting to talk to someone," said Jeff Rowe, a pharmacist at Diplomat Pharmacy.

The Bush administration did not want the benefits to be administered by the federal government and instead allowed companies to create plans for seniors.

Michigan has 41 plans available with varying co-payments and benefit packages.

Progress seen in health of Jackson-area babies

Saturday, January 28, 2006

By Brian Wheeler
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The number of children with low birthweight born to mothers seen by the Center for Family Health has dropped in half in four years.

The Center for Family Health, one of Jackson County's leading health-care providers, hailed its news Friday as progress in local child health.

Low birthweight at birth puts newborns at risk for health problems or death.

A climbing death rate among Jackson County infants led local health officials to create a task force into that problem.

"Low birthweight is a predictor of infant mortality," said Molly Kaser, the center's executive director. "That community initiative looking at those target areas has made a difference."

The nonprofit center, which offers reduced-price medical care to the Jackson community, said just 6.3 percent of the children born to its patients last year were born with a low birthweight. That figure stood at 12.9 percent in 2002.

The center's officials attributed that decline to their push to curb smoking among expecting mothers, the result of a grant from the Jackson County Community Foundation, and their outreach to make sure patients get proper care.

Expecting mothers should see a medical professional during the first trimester and make nine medical visits for a full-term pregnancy, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

"Prenatal care in and of itself is not magical," Kaser said. "But you're more likely to catch problems."

Anti-smoking program may help infant health

Saturday, January 28, 2006

By Brian Wheeler

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Low-income women in Jackson County who smoke during pregnancy soon will get help to quit, a potentially big development in the community's battle against infant mortality.

The county Health Department will use \$25,000 from the March of Dimes to help women in the Women, Infants and Children to kick a habit that carries risks for unborn children.

Smoking is linked to early delivery, low birthweight in newborns and sudden infant death syndrome.

A review of infant deaths found that more than half had mothers who smoked, local health officials say.

"That's why it's so important to have resources (to quit smoking) available in the community," said Dr. Amy Schultz, who chairs a local task force looking at prenatal care.

The smoking-cessation program that will start in March grew from an infant-mortality team and task force that started work in 2002. Physicians and health officials have explored why so many Jackson County infants -- an average of 17 a year from 2001 to 2003 -- don't survive.

Jackson County has ranked near the bottom in state rankings on that issue and on other bellwethers of problems, including teen pregnancy.

The new program will target a group of people who may be at particular risk.

Half of women in the WIC program in Jackson County smoked in the three months before pregnancy in 2003, and 32 percent still smoked in the last three months before they gave birth, the health department said, passing along federal data.

Kellie Schiller, the county health educator who is leading the no-smoking program, said 18.5 percent of all Jackson County women are smokers.

"The fact that 51 percent of our WIC population smokes is significantly higher than the average," she said.

The local Center for Family Health has worked with its pregnant patients to quit smoking, and Foote Hospital runs a smoking-cessation program that's open to pregnant women. But the new effort will take a different strategy.

Schiller will receive training at the Mayo Clinic in March and be certified as a tobacco treatment specialist. Up to 87 women this year will go through six hourlong sessions, with the incentive of gift certificates at the end.

Suspect arrested in slaying of troubled Flint teen

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Saturday, January 28, 2006

By Kim Crawford
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FLINT - After DeAndre D. Robinson turned 17 in late October, his juvenile court probation officer recommended that his probation be ended since the juvenile system could do nothing more for him.

"DeAndre has the potential to succeed," his probation officer, Stacy Carter, wrote in early November. "However, he continually makes bad decisions.

"DeAndre is now of adult age and therefore subject to the adult system."

Just weeks before, he'd been arrested by Flint police for carrying a weapon. And less than a month later, he was arrested for burglary, for which he spent a day in jail before he was released. But this week, Robinson's mother and stepfather made his funeral arrangements after he was found dead Monday afternoon. Police said they acted on an anonymous tip, finding his body, shot multiple times, in abandoned house at 228 E. Taylor St.

On Friday, Flint police arrested a suspect in connection with the fatal shooting. The suspect was placed in the Genesee County Jail and is awaiting arraignment. An officer who knew Robinson said his death was the tragic outcome of a troubled life.

"We bent over backwards to try to keep him (Robinson) in school," said Houston Tipton, one of the Flint police Youth Services Bureau officers who'd arrested Robinson in the past. "His mother begged us to make him.

"He would just stop going, and he was constantly in and out of the detention center."

The Journal was unable to reach Robinson's mother for comment.

Court files show that Robinson's record of trouble went back to August 2004, when he was 15 and charged with attempted home invasion after he allegedly tried to break into an occupied home on Daryll Drive. At the time, court officials noted that his mother "cannot control (Robinson's) delinquent activities."

Over the course of the 1 1/2 years, Robinson was in and out of the Genesee Valley Regional Detention Center. He faced additional charges of home invasion, safe-breaking and violation of his probation, though some of the cases were dismissed in deals when he pled no contest to a lesser charge and vowed to meet probationary terms.

He was supposed to stay in school. But after he was 16, court records show, he stopped going and would stay away from his mother's home for days at a time.

Placed on an electronic tether and made a temporary ward of the court by Judge John Gadola of the family division of the Genesee Circuit Court, Robinson didn't seem to let up in terms of trouble - he was kicked out of school, clashed with his stepfather and violated curfew.

And though he was on an intensive probation, late last year it was considered that "the terms of his probation had been completed," court records show. Less than more than two months after his last arrest in late November, officers found his body.

"It's a sad thing," said Sgt. Henry Younger of the Youth Services Bureau. "But he made all the wrong choices."

MIRS
January 27, 2006

Hollister-Gaffney Oppose Welfare Cut-off

Add the names of David HOLLISTER and state AFL-CIO president Mark **Gaffney** to the list of those opposing a mandatory cut-off of welfare benefits after a recipient has been on the roles for 48 months.

When Hollister represented Lansing in the House, he said he fought that proposal every year as conservative Republicans tried to jam it through. Now in his closing days as director of the Department of Labor and Economic Growth Hollister has not changed his tune.

"It's too simplistic," he told *MIRS*. "We are in a complex economy and people have barriers to successfully completing employment ... four years is a pretty short time."

Republicans have taken credit for offering job training and education to those who cannot find a job, but Hollister is not impressed with those elements, either.

"Thirty-eight percent of the population is illiterate. They can't read, so putting them on some kind of training program just isn't going to work in a short term," he said.

Reminded that the GOP and the governor were talking about exemptions to the automatic loss of benefits, Hollister concluded, "That makes it more acceptable, but I think that's the wrong debate ..."

Concurring with Hollister is Gaffney, who is urging the governor to veto the package if it is "too stringent and too restrictive."

Gaffney wondered where these folks are going to find work if they are booted off the roles.

"I think that that is a sad thing that in Michigan's economy, the trouble we've got, we're going to go to those least fortunate and least able to work, who are having the toughest time and put additional restrictions and requirements on them. That's a little strange to me," Gaffney said.

He, too, was asked about the exemptions the governor was trying to work into the program.

"The governor is right to say we need a lot more leeway in this," Gaffney said.

One of his "leeways" would be to take out the lifetime restrictions piece.

Gaffney argued given Michigan's up and down economy, it's wrong to think workers would not need welfare assistance after four years on the roles.

(Contributed by Senior Capital Correspondent Tim SKUBICK.)

Editorials

Detroit Free Press

Cruel Budget

'Narrowing' spending would put squeeze on needy

January 30, 2006

Congress apparently will not be deterred from passing a multi-year budget bill that wreaks havoc on social services, student loan programs and other help for Americans who haven't made the big time -- or unexpectedly fall out of it. But Republicans in Michigan's House delegation, especially those who like to claim the moderate mantle for themselves, ought to go down swinging.

The bill does not have to pass. Yes, President George W. Bush will probably call for it in his State of the Union address Tuesday, and yes, it's listed as a priority for the House when it resumes business Wednesday.

But Congress only occasionally does a budget reconciliation bill like this. It's designed to narrow spending over a 5- to 10-year period, so members can say they're doing something about the deficit. Feel free to snicker, especially since Republicans plan to extend tax breaks immediately thereafter -- tax breaks that will more than wipe out this bill's "savings."

The bill shoves \$12.7 billion in costs for college loans back on students, trims Medicaid, cuts money to help states enforce child support orders and fails to keep up with the child care needs of low-income working families. It was a disaster even before two dark-of-night insertions:

Welfare: An overhaul, never fully debated on its own merits, includes a penalty for states that don't get at least 50% of recipients into jobs. In Michigan, where jobs are scarce, that provision could cost as much as \$75 million.

Citizenship proof for Medicaid: Many of the elderly, especially black Americans from the South who weren't born in hospitals and didn't get birth certificates, may lose care as a result of this unexpected new rule. It could lead to hardship for anyone in the midst of a medical emergency who can't locate documents fast enough.

Meanwhile, the midnight negotiators shielded their health-care industry friends by dropping a Senate attempt to rein in excessive fees paid out under Medicare -- one of the few sensible cost-cutting measures in the bill.

Congress can address these programs individually in future budget years without codifying such dreadful rules now. No lawmaker can hide behind a claim that the reconciliation bill is essential, let alone humane. Shame on any Michigan representative who tries.

Days of cheap heat are over, experts say

Gas customers dial down to cope with costs

Sunday, January 29, 2006

BY GEOFF LARCOM
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporters

Cindy Symonik and her husband, Mark, took many of the usual steps. They closed various vents, put glass doors on their fireplace, had extra insulation installed and set the thermostat at 65 in their 2,200-square-foot home in Pittsfield Township. Yet the Symoniks, who had paid \$182 to DTE Energy for electric and gas service in November, saw the bill for rise to \$427 in December and to \$448 this month. For gas alone, they paid \$320.51 in their most recent bill.

"I knew it was coming, but I didn't realize it was going to be this expensive," Cindy Symonik said. "It kills your household budget."

Sue Perry had top-of-the-line windows and recommended insulation installed in her west side Ann Arbor home, built in 2004. Then she got her \$399 gas bill early this month, up from \$220 last year.

"I was flabbergasted," she said. "I don't think it really hits home until you're looking at the bill in front of you and you have to write a check."

Despite unseasonably warm weather in recent days, heating bills from December have sent chills into thousands of area residents as they struggle to weave bigger payments into their monthly budgets.

Yet local experts say such sticker shock can vary widely, that what you pay - and why - can vary depending upon variables such as your gas provider, the kind of home you have, and the special measures you take.

And they add that even though the recent warm weather and a drop in the regulated price of gas for February will help push bills down a bit next month, the dramatic rise in fuel prices is here to stay.

Setting the price

Each spring, representatives from the state's two main utilities, Consumers Energy and DTE Energy's Michigan Consolidated Gas, lay out how much they expect to charge customers for natural gas from April 1 to the following March 31.

The companies present projections based on how much their customers will use, plus weather predictions and forecasts on what will happen to the market price of natural gas in the near future.

It's the job of the three-member Michigan Public Service Commission to approve the proposals, or negotiate new caps on prices the utilities will offer in the coming heating season.

"Those (prices) are looked at very, very carefully," says Judy Palnau, spokeswoman for the PSC. "And only the costs which are deemed reasonable and prudent are approved."

But 2005 was anything but a reasonable year. After hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast, where more than half of the country's natural gas is produced and distributed, prices soared.

Under Michigan law, utilities are not allowed to make a profit from natural gas. But they're just as eager not to lose money on it, either. So both utilities returned to the PSC in October, and offered updated prices they said reflected the new market conditions for natural gas.

The new price caps for January meant the average residential customer for Consumers Energy would pay \$42 more a month, or 33 percent more than the previous January. The increase was larger for MichCon customers, who saw an average increase of \$76.26 more than last year, a 59 percent increase, compared with last year, according to the PSC.

"It was more than a surprise, it truly was a serious change," said Jeff Holyfield, spokesman for Consumers Energy said in the utility's return to regulators.

Palnau says that about 80 percent of a homeowner's bill is due to the cost of natural gas as a commodity. Companies are only allowed to make a profit on what is called the distribution charge, the 20 percent of the bill that makes up costs for meter reading, equipment and maintenance.

Officials say such variances stem from the size of the company, its facilities, and the amount of summer storage space it has for natural gas. In addition, MichCon is recovering some costs because its negotiated price was too low last year, Palnau said. Similarly, if it had been overcharging, the company would have to return the money, plus interest.

Yet relief is in store for customers of both companies with next month's bills. Last week, the Public Service Commission announced that Michigan natural gas customers would see slight savings thanks to warmer winter temperatures and a reduction in prices. Consumers Energy customers should see savings of 7.1 percent in their next bill, and MichCon customers will find savings of 3.3 percent in the rate they pay.

Yet, despite the momentary good news, higher prices are here to stay, says John Russell, president and chief operating officer of Consumers Energy.

And even people who avoid the utility companies and use propane are spending considerably more this year. Connie and Chris Woodruff of Chelsea most recently paid \$650 for propane for their 2,700 square-foot house, up from just under \$500 a month last year. "It's insane right now," Connie Woodruff says.

Long-term trend

Even before this year, area heating bills had risen dramatically, which 78-year-old Jerold White demonstrated as he opened up a ledger and read aloud from a long list of entries.

In 1970 he used about 1,050 units of natural gas, which is measured in increments of 100 cubic

feet, and paid \$124 to heat his Ann Arbor home. In 2004, he burned 510 units of gas, paying \$511 to keep the same house warm, he said.

"So I've got the use down by half and I'm paying five times as much," said White, who worked for Detroit Edison for 40 years and has tracked his energy habits for about the same period of time.

For White, jotting down prices, consumption rates, various formulas and charts has become somewhat of a hobby.

In order to keep the house locked at 70 degrees, he insulates, and reinsulates. White even vents his dryer inside the house, instead of letting the hot air pour outside.

The DTE customer also divides the number days he runs his furnace by the amount of heat he consumes. "That tells you how efficient you've been," he said.

House type matters

Along with preventive measures such as caulking and lowering the thermostat, building experts say a lot of what you will pay for heating bills is determined when your house is built.

"The basic construction of your house is a huge play into the process," says Henry Haley, owner of Haley Mechanical heating and cooling service in Dexter. Haley says that variable-speed furnaces that don't simply fire up or turn off can save \$250 to \$300 a year.

The location of a house is also a factor, Haley noted. For example, a house that has lots of trees around it can often have a lesser heating bill than a house that sits out in the open, where the wind can whip up higher heating costs.

Other construction details such as wall thickness, insulation, ductwork and the care put into installation of sealing agents, such as Tyvek, play a role, says Haskiel Brown, installation supervisor for Koch & White Heating and Cooling in Ann Arbor.

"Two homes with a similar look on the outside can have totally different utility expenses,"

Brown said. Some homes don't heat or cool well on the second floor because of faulty ductwork or improper furnace type, he said.

Two houses with identical floor plans, one built in the summer and one built in the winter, can have a 10 to 15 percent difference in their heating bill, says Wayne Appleyard, an architect with Sunstructures Architects of Ann Arbor. That's because winter workmanship in tougher weather conditions might not be as good. "The human factor in building a house is pretty high,"

Appleyard says.

Necessity drives options

Consumers with established homes are also finding ways to trim their heating bills. Pat Fielder of Manchester installed a blower in his fireplace that stems the flow of hot air up the chimney and recirculates it in the downstairs of his 2,300-square foot home, which was built in the 1860s. He's closed off certain rooms, put up extra plastic on doors, and programs his thermostat, all of which helped him pay \$413 for his last gas and electric bill to Consumers Energy.

"It's an old home," he says of the classic structure with the wraparound porch off Main Street.

"I've done what I thought was worth doing."

The ultimate example of taming high heating bills comes from Mark Dorogi, who owns a passive solar house on Traver Road in Ann Arbor.

Dorogi's home has solar panels on the roof and numerous windows on the south side to let in the sun. He paid \$230 on his most recent DTE bill, including \$172 for gas in the 3,800-square foot home.

"We're pretty happy with the way it turned out," he said. "We're saving at least \$100 a month compared to a typical house."

Dexter resident Gerry Navarre is planning for the future as he and his wife, Joanne, build a new home in the Loch Alpine subdivision. He will install a geo-thermal heat pump in the new house, along with wet-blown cellulose insulation. He says he knows his heating bills aren't going to get any smaller, which means the payback periods are shorter for money that's spent on such upgrades.

"I'll spend the money now, because it's the last house we'll be in," Navarre says. "Cheap energy is done."

Staff reporter Tracy Davis contributed to this report. Geoff Larcom can be reached at glarcom@annarbornnews.com or 734-994-6838.

Know your rights if you have trouble paying your gas bill

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Ann Arbor News

Here are some of the rules

Utilities must offer a bill payment plan to senior citizens and low-income customers to avoid utility service shutoffs in the winter.

They must give you a chance to pay your bill in smaller payments if you have a financial emergency.

They must continue utility service for a fair amount of time if you provide proof that a medical emergency exists in your home.

They must let you know of any programs available to help you pay your bill and must give you a booklet describing these rules and your rights as a customer.

They must allow you to have a hearing when other attempts to resolve a problem have failed.

Other tips for consumers

Contact the utility company quickly with problems or questions concerning your service.

If the company's review fails to answer the question or resolve the issue, consumers can ask the company for an informal hearing. If the consumer does not agree with an informal hearing decision, it can be appealed to the Public Service Commission staff, which can be done by phone Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. The last step in the MPSC complaint process is a formal complaint.

There is help for seniors and low-income customers under the state's Winter Protection Plan.

Other programs are available to help as well.

For more information, contact the Michigan Public Service Commission at 517-241-6180, or visit its Web site at www.michigan.gov/mpsc.

Source: Michigan Public Service Commission; compiled by staff reporter Tracy Davis

Lansing State Journal

January 30, 2006

Letters to the editor

Help is too late

I just finished reading the Jan. 18 article on the two-hour home winterizing workshop. What a great idea. It would have been an even better idea to have it before winter.

I went to the Michigan Public Service Commission Web site to check various dates of the workshop, only to find a lot of the dates were undetermined. Most of dates that had been set were in mid-February or March. One was even after the first day of spring.

How sad.

Greg Leap

Lansing

Man accused of sexually assaulting wife

Monday, January 30, 2006

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com 388-7784

A 39-year-old Kalamazoo Township man accused of kidnapping and sexually assaulting his estranged wife was to be arraigned today in Kalamazoo County District Court, authorities said. The man and his estranged wife had reportedly met Friday at a local restaurant to discuss business, according to Portage Police. After the dinner, the man, whose name was not released, allegedly lured the woman to his vehicle, forced her inside and then bound and gagged her. Investigators said the man then took the woman to an address in Kalamazoo where he sexually assaulted her numerous times over several hours.

The incident was reported to Portage authorities at about 3 p.m. Saturday. After receiving the report, officers arrested the man at his Kalamazoo Township apartment without incident, investigators said.

The man has been charged with one count of kidnapping and four counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. He was being held at the Portage City Jail this morning on \$250,000 bond, police said.

Published January 29, 2006

A Home for Me teaches foster care kids life skills Nonprofit program helps teens leaving state-run system

By Karen Lynn Todd
Special to the State Journal

BATTLE CREEK - Most teens eagerly await their 18th birthday because it may mean freedom, the privilege to vote or fun times during their senior year in high school.

But when 17-year-old Carol was approaching age 18, she had the birthday blues. That is, until she found a program called A Home for Me.

A Home for Me is a nonprofit organization specifically geared for helping teens in kinship or foster care get prepared for life as an adult.

"Before I started the program, I was terrified about my 18th birthday," Carol said. "I didn't want it to come. I was scared to be on my own, but I'm not as scared now."

The Department of Human Services does not release the last names of minors to protect their identities.

While A Home for Me is still in its beginning stages and has been evolving each month since it began in November, Carol said she has learned a lot and is more prepared for adulthood.

Learning life skills

The classes, aimed at foster kids who are 14 to 18 years old, cover such topics as how to find an apartment, where to go for help, how to be more relaxed in an interview.

"I wasn't thinking about all of those things," Carol said. "I'm glad I know now."

Every year, about 18,000 youth in the United States are released from the foster care system when they reach age 18 or finish high school, according to the Web site www.fosterclub.com. Foster Club is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide information and encouragement for kids in foster care.

About 100 teens age 14 to 18 are in the Michigan Department of Human Services' Calhoun County division of the foster care system, and 46 percent of them will stay in for at least 10 months, according to the Michigan Supreme Court's annual report.

Carol's story is all too familiar to kids who end up in the state-run foster care system. And Wanda Miller knows it.

Miller is a licensed social worker, a mother to foster care children and director of A Home for Me. She said her passion for starting the program that's just for foster teens stems from seeing what her own family members have gone through the last several years.

"I have nieces and nephews who grew up in foster care and at age 18 were emancipated out of the system," Miller said.

"Once they were out, they had no idea how to find a job, how to keep a job or how to find a decent apartment."

That's where Miller's program fills in the gap.

Couldn't find help

Miller said she looked for programs to help teens prepare for adulthood but her search yielded nothing.

A Home for Me started out enrolling the youth in a semester-long program with life skills classes and other events. Miller has changed the focus to more short-term sessions because she found that the teens were not holding to their commitment.

The organization so far has received grants from Yes We Can and the Community Foundation Alliance of Calhoun County for supplies and computer equipment.

Rose Miller, A Home for Me board member and a former foster care youth from age 13, said she had a great foster mom and appreciates everything her foster mom did for her. Still, it would have been great to have a program like A Home For Me when she was getting ready to be on her own, she said.

"When there is a disruption in your home, you don't feel like anyone cares," said Rose Miller, who is not related to Wanda Miller.

"Just having someone there to walk me through step-by-step would have made a difference. Because of Wanda's vision, this is going to help a lot of kids."

Karen Lynn Todd is a freelance writer.

Flint pastor answers call to help with new men's shelter

Black History Month 2006

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Sunday, January 29, 2006

By Robert Snell
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FLINT - The first night was slow. Five beds full.

The second night, a dozen.

Every night since, the new My Brother's Keeper of Genesee County shelter has been booked solid with 16 homeless men.

That growth illustrates the need that drove a Flint pastor to open the shelter Jan. 9.

My Brother's Keeper of Genesee County is filling a niche in a community where only about 200 beds are available in a handful of shelters for men, women and children. U.S. Census figures show more than double the national average of people are living below the poverty level in Flint.

The new shelter for men is run by Patrick McNeal, a Flint native and local pastor who also happens to be an associate registrar at Kettering University.

Yes, that means the married father of six is busy.

During the day, he's at Kettering. Then he heads to the shelter, whose doors open at 7 p.m.

Everyone must leave by 7 a.m. the next morning.

McNeal, who is black, draws inspiration from the accomplishments of historical African-American men such as scientist Benjamin Banneker and scholar W.E.B. DuBois.

But he said good fathers, good neighbors and just regular people often go unnoticed in history books and celebrations such as Black History Month, which starts Wednesday.

"There are so many men whose names are not written in any book or journal and who are not talked about who have just as much impact on lives," McNeal said. "Looking at black history, and history in general, we shouldn't look past those who are closest to us."

It's McNeal's approach that distinguishes the shelter.

McNeal does not limit the amount of days people can stay, as other shelters do.

That's because McNeal learned some homeless people would voluntarily leave missions and temporarily sleep under highway overpasses or abandoned homes so they wouldn't be barred from returning to shelters.

He focuses on basic necessities - food, shelter, clothing - as a way to affect a broad transformation.

"It's not just a place to come and rest and in the morning, get out," said shelter supervisor Lonnie Benjamin, 31, who was homeless in the early 1990s in California. "It's a place to come for

QUICK TAKE

How to help To contribute to My Brother's Keeper of Genesee County, a new men's shelter in Flint, call (810) 234-1163. The shelter needs money, cleaning products, food and clothes.

restoration. We want them to receive Jesus. We don't force it on them, but we keep planting seeds."

McNeal eventually wants guests to set goals, whether it's quitting drugs and alcohol, reconnecting with relatives or finding a job.

"We're here to walk with them, not impose our will," he said.

Then, he can pair them with substance abuse counselors, job placement agencies or mental health officials and help them learn financial management and life skills.

"I think he is going about it in the right way," said Sybyl Atwood, program director of volunteer services at the Resource Center.

The new shelter will supplement a network of institutions serving homeless people, including Carriage Town Ministries.

Carriage Town has two facilities for men and women that can accommodate about 110 people. The centers are usually booked, said Executive Director Lois St. Clair, who welcomed news of McNeal's venture.

"The more we have, the better we can serve the public," she said. "The need is increasing."

Governor taps Jackson native as state's new children's ombudsman

Jackson Citizen Patriot

January 27, 2006

A Jackson native has been tapped as Michigan's new children's ombudsman.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm this month named Verlie Ruffin to the position, which investigates complaints and lobbies for policies that protect children. She leaves her job as associate director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families.

Ruffin, 58, was born and raised in Jackson. She graduated from Jackson High School in 1966 before attending Michigan State University.

Her mother, Verlie Sampson, and a sister and brother still live in Jackson.

"Verlie has made it her mission in life to fight for and protect Michigan's children," Granholm said in a statement.

"I am confident her experience, her leadership and her compassion will reinforce and strengthen the welfare of our children across the state."

Monday, January 30, 2006

Charities cheer Big Game's bounty Leftover food, materials will aid needy

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Football fans aren't the only ones who stand to celebrate the arrival of the Super Bowl -- charities and those they serve have reason to cheer, too.

Food rescue groups, the Special Olympics, an after-school facility for youths and Habitat for Humanity, among others, are all in line to score.

The groups that feed the hungry expect to pick up such goodies as mini-beef Wellington, pumpkin bisque and chocolate mousse cups left over from Super Bowl parties, a far cry from the soup and sandwiches that are staples in food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens.

"It's going to be a special treat for them and certainly those less fortunate deserve that," said Darlene Paulauski of Gleaners Community Food Bank, which will work with Forgotten Harvest to collect perhaps as much as 50,000 pounds of food.

The biggest event in sports has spawned more than 150 events that will benefit local charities, from swank parties expected to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to fun events like a midwinter dip in the Detroit River on Saturday to benefit the Special Olympics.

The Big Game will leave behind equipment and materials for nonprofit reuse or fundraising and for the Detroit/NFL Youth Education Town, an after-school facility for local youths that is under construction on the west side of Detroit. The NFL and the host committee each have contributed \$1 million to build the center. It will be at the Gardenview Estates, formerly Herman Gardens, bordered by Southfield Road, Joy Road and Tireman, and will be managed by the Boys and Girls Club of Southeastern Michigan.

"It is all part of legacy of the Super Bowl," said Colin Utley of the Detroit Super Bowl XL Host Committee, which requires sanctioned events to have a charitable component.

The Super Bowl couldn't have come to Detroit at a better time -- many charities have been struggling and donors have been fatigued by giving to natural disasters within the past year. .

The Motor City Super Party was held Friday at the Detroit City Airport to benefit Habitat for Humanity Detroit, Communities in Schools Detroit, the Tuskegee Airmen Museum and the Warren/Conner Development Coalition.

"It's going to be very helpful," said Sherita Smith, fund development director of the Warren/Conner Development Coalition, which provides services to citizens on the east side of Detroit. "The economy is pretty bad and it's hitting nonprofits really hard. It's been a great opportunity to highlight some of the great nonprofits in the community. Every day we're touching families, touching lives, revitalizing communities."

On the agenda this Saturday is Groove Detroit ... Art in Motion, a party hosted by Bill Ford Jr. and Roger Penske, the Super Bowl coordinator. The evening, which will feature food, jazz and an eclectic hairdressing duo from Spain, will benefit the Children's Center in Detroit.

And at the Ferndale Metro Blues Festival, which began last weekend, 75 concerts are scheduled to be held in 20 separate venues over a nine-day period. All of the proceeds will benefit the Ferndale Youth Assistance program and the Midwest AIDS Prevention Project.

"We want all the charities involved to do well," said Craig Covey, executive director of the Midwest AIDS Prevention Project. "It's not all about million-dollar commercials on television or million-dollar salaries to the players. A portion of the big money should go to the charities. It adds some humanity to the event."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Hope and help

People in need can get free groceries, health services, job fair information, haircuts and more from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Michigan State Fairgrounds, at Woodward and Eight Mile in Detroit.

Those who come can enjoy live entertainment, games for children and more.

Known as the Convoy of Hope, the event is a collaboration of more than 100 businesses, community organizations and interdenominational churches.

The event is free.

Super Bowl XL: News

MITCH ALBOM: Let's get serious amid fun, games

January 27, 2006

BY MITCH ALBOM

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

For most of my life, charity meant writing a check.

But a few years ago, a former professor of mine scolded me for not doing more. He told me if you're in the public eye, you can rouse people to action.

So today, with your kindness, I'm going to try and do that, because I heard a story a few weeks ago and I couldn't get it out of my head.

The story, in essence, was that, with the city's encouragement, a local homeless shelter was going to offer a three-day "party" over Super Bowl weekend that would provide food and a big-screen TV -- and would also cut the visibility of our most downtrodden citizens.

Other Super Bowl cities tried similar ideas. Many defend it as being a good host.

Personally, I kept thinking about Feb. 6, the day *after* the Super Bowl. I had this vision of the shelter doors opening, and hundreds of homeless people being nudged out into the cold, essentially being told, "Party's over. Good luck."

That really bothered me. So I called the Detroit Rescue Mission, on Third Street in Detroit, where the idea had originated. And I spoke to Chad Audi, the chief operating officer.

And then I went there.

Out of sight, but not out of mind

What I saw would break your heart and give it wings. Lines formed before sunset, dozens of men in dirty sweatshirts, old coats, worn-out shoes. They had to line up in an alley, because, Audi says, the city doesn't want lines of homeless folks visible from the street.

Even at a shelter, they have to go in the back door.

Once inside, the men were given a bed, a hot shower, an offer of new clothes (or to have their own clothes washed) a warm meal, some time in the chapel -- only if they wanted -- and finally, a night of shelter from the cold.

In the morning, they would be given breakfast before being advised of various programs offered around the city.

"We can't stay open all day right now," Audi says. "We're not set up for it. And we don't have a mental health specialist, which is what we really need."

While I was there, I met a man on crutches named Johnny (Ringo) Smith. He is 47. A few years ago, he was dropped off at the shelter's door, a drug addict with a criminal history.

"I needed help," he told me. "I had to understand why I was doing drugs. ... They gave me help, a place to stay. ... I've been off drugs since October 2001."

He is now on the shelter staff.

If we can spend \$60,000 on shrimp and booze ...

So, OK. Here's my thinking. Why should people like this get a phony Super Bowl weekend of heightened kindness, then be scaled back?

Why not do what this "party" weekend was supposed to do, but do it all winter?

So say hello to "S.A.Y. Detroit" -- which stands for Super All Year. Not Super next week. Not Super Sunday. Super All Year.

The goal is to raise \$60,000 by kickoff. With that, Audi says, he can do all of the following until mid-April:

Keep the shelter open 24 hours.

Add 30 new beds.

Get a 24-hour-a-day van with a trained staff member to respond to any phone call and pick up a needy individual.

Add a mental health worker to the staff.

I know we can do this. With all the money floating around this city next week, it seems a sin if we don't. People will spend \$60,000 in one night on shrimp and booze. How can we not keep the least of us warm until spring?

A phone number: **313-993-4700**. They take credit cards. Yes, it is tax deductible.

An address: **Detroit Rescue Mission, 150 Stimson, Detroit, Michigan 48201**.

I wouldn't ask you to do anything I wouldn't, so the first check written was mine.

S.A.Y. Detroit. Call me naive. But I think this is a way to make the Super Bowl a lot more than a fleeting game. Thank you.

Contact **MITCH ALBOM** at 313-223



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Local collaboratives in Kalamazoo, Branch and St. Joseph counties among first to receive *Great Start* Collaborative grants

*Early Childhood Investment Corporation grants focus on early childhood
development and care*

January 30, 2006

LANSING – Today the superintendents of the Kalamazoo, Branch, and St. Joseph intermediate school districts will join board members of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and local legislators to celebrate grants for local “Great Start” collaboratives that will strengthen early childhood development and care in southwest Michigan.

Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow and ECIC chief operating officer Mike Foley will present ceremonial checks to by Dr. Craig Misner of Kalamazoo County RESA, Michael Beckwith of the Branch ISD, and Dr. Jay Newman of the St. Joseph County ISD.

From the day she took office, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has maintained that early childhood development and care is a critical investment in the economic viability of the state.

“Children learn more from birth to age three than at any other time, setting the stage for future success in school and in life,” Granholm said. “High-quality early childhood development and care is a wise investment in our children and our economy.”

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, which the Governor announced in her 2005 State of the State address, is developing the framework for effective early childhood development and care programs through partnerships with local collaboratives around the state. The local “Great Start” collaboratives will conduct a community assessment and develop a strategic plan for the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood services and supports, accessible to all children from birth to kindergarten and their families.

“These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors, including government, business, civic, faith, education, and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development,” said Mike Foley. “The board was able to award this first round of grants with the resources currently available, and is committed to funding Great Start Collaboratives throughout the state as new funding sources are identified.”

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. The St. Joseph County ISD will receive a \$90,000 Great Start Collaborative grant; the Kalamazoo RESA will receive a \$60,000 planning grant; and the Branch ISD will receive a \$50,000 planning grant. Eleven other ISDs and RESAs around the state were also awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great Start Collaboratives.

“Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates,” DHS Director Marianne Udow said. “By improving the skills of a large fraction of the

workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state's ability to compete in the global market."

For more information about the ECIC and Great Start collaboratives, visit the Project Great Start Web site at www.michigan.gov/greatstart